

A few years ago I found myself driving a van full of teenagers back from a concert at Gillette Stadium. Anyone of you who has done so knows that one doesn't go far or fast; and you have time to consider your life at length while the kids in back are singing at the top of their lungs. After about an hour or so, we finally left the parking lot and were inching along Route 1 North. Streams of cars tried to merge ahead of everyone else. I paused, trying to let a smaller car get in front of me. I flashed my lights, honked gently, asked one of the kids to roll down the window and waive the person ahead. The hapless driver was frozen, eyes glued ahead. I gave up. Turning to my front seat companion, I said "Why doesn't she trust me?" "She's afraid," was the response. "You might be a SOCCER MOM."

Well, although I wasn't a screaming-from-the-sidelines-ejected-from-the-game kind of person, I WAS a soccer mom. Now I'm a white, middle-aged Unitarian Universalist minister who carries a Red Sox clergy card. And I consider myself progressive and a straight ally. Some of my characteristics are obvious and some don't emerge until I open my mouth. Find me one other middle-aged white woman in a crowd wearing a chalice, a baseball cap and an earnest expression and we'll gravitate toward one another. This is my social identity. However, I will look and act different in a room full of conservative, Yankee fans. This is also my social identity. Such a person in the same crowded room, or on the crowded highway, might see me as a threat and it may be as impossible for us to talk as to merge lanes.

Thinking ourselves part of a group gives a kind of comfort and safety and power from being one of "us" and not "them." Then of course there is the fun aspect of which group is larger. Do you want to be in the majority or the minority? Some of us definitely want to be in the majority; believing that most people would support our positions or feelings or actions. Anyone who is not in the majority with us, we think, must really want to be there if they only could. We are truly shocked when social or political or economic events don't turn out the way we expected. Then, we become the silent and grumpy majority.

Some of us cannot imagine being in the majority – how boring. We're in the minority, and proud of it! Maybe we know we look and act nothing like the majority. Maybe we have no choice, our skin is a different color, our language isn't the same, and we find comfort and safety and power in recognizing one another in the crowd. Or, perhaps, our differences aren't so obvious because they're on the inside. It might be the way we love, the way we think, the values we hold dear. Some of us would rather be one of the few who know the way the world really works, or who know the truth, or who know what is divine and what a deity wants or a hundred other things that make us one of us and not them.

The only real truth to all of this I have learned is: The more we define ourselves *against* others, majority or minority, the more freedom we have to fear and to spread fear; the more freedom we have to hate. "I am a – fill in the blank – out to make the world, or this town or my neighborhood safe for people like me because my rights are in danger, we are in danger." This is part of the world we live in, where a lot of our fellow humans on the planet are determined to define themselves *against* others. In that neighborhood, in that town, in that world, there is no mutuality or trust or compassion between us and them, and therefore no progress – only dissent and stagnation.

Our faith asks us to define ourselves as different parts of the whole. Each and every principle of Unitarian Universalism says know yourself, respect differences, and work together. We live the rainbow: our light, can be divided into all of its aspects and be more beautiful. Separate parts work in tandem to make up an amazing whole. Voices can be in harmony, because the song is more than the singer. It's tough having such a perspective in this world. Neither Us nor Them like the idea. In sixteenth century Transylvania, court preacher Francis David is said to have spoken the memorable words: "We need not think alike to love alike." Neither he nor the first Unitarian kingdom in the world lasted as long as they should have.

I say we need not love alike to be faithful alike. And just like loving is limited if it is confined to the limits of one's own heart; being faithful is limited if confined to the limits of one's own identity, and one's own church. We have to act on love, and act on faith to be effective in this world.

On June 14th of 2007 I left my daughter and her friends and my fellow clergy members on the steps of the state house and joined a long line of people hoping to observe the vote on the proposed constitutional ban on same-sex marriage. Over the course of three hours, we edged down the hallway and up the stairs to wrap around corridors and wait. Volunteers and staffers handed out pins to identify us as for or against the ban.

I happened to be in the midst of a determined group who had bused themselves in from Virginia to support the ban. After the first hour, we began to sit down on the floor and make ourselves comfortable. A tall, spare-looking

gentleman to my left asked me to “explain something, just because I’m curious...” Yeah, right, I said to myself – you bused yourself all the way up here because you’re just curious. “I’m not against gays,” he said, “but I don’t understand what all the fuss is about. Why aren’t civil unions enough?” I took a deep breath. “Tell me, are you married?” “I was,” he said, grinning. “Would you have preferred to be civilly united with your wife, or married?” “Couldn’t have both,” he said. We then started talking about separate but equal and Brown versus the Board of Education. That was followed by the separation of church and state.

Along about the time he and I got to benefits, child-rearing and health proxy rights, the hallway started to get restive. We all started to take bathroom breaks, and bring back snacks from the cafeteria. We started to talk about our homes and families and the weather and wet versus dry barbecue sauce. Then the state house staff announced that the vote was imminent. We filed in, filling the downstairs and balcony to overflowing. The staff warned us several times to not make noise and to not respond when the votes were counted. I took a seat next to two couples with five children between them; even the littlest ones were quiet. I heard someone come down the aisle behind me and turned to find my companion from the hallway. “I haven’t changed my mind,” he said, “but I’d like to sit with you.” I think that meant almost as much to me as did the vote eight minutes later to defeat the ban.

This middle-aged straight white card-carrying minister wanted to extend an umbrella of safety to her friends and colleagues and all the children who grew up a bit different from her. She didn’t want any child, man or woman to be hidden in any kitchen. She wanted them to grow strong in the house with the same rights and privileges and expectations of a long and rewarding life. She loved her van rocking with the noise of teenagers and wanted to shout there’s nothing to be afraid of here! Every teenager should be bouncing the suspension with a soccer mom who loves them. A lot of them don’t. And a lot of *those* teenagers are LGBTQ and are doubly at risk losing everything.

I just read in the Boston Globe that our sister church in Cambridge is going to provide winter shelter for homeless teens in Harvard Square.

“‘Y2Y Harvard Square’,” which is scheduled to open in November following a \$1.1 million renovation of the church’s subterranean auditorium, will offer temporary shelter for young adults age 18 to 24 during the coldest six months of the year. The aim is to provide a sanctuary where young people can find their way to a stable housing situation and, eventually, a more promising future.

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And homeless youths tend to need different kinds of help than their adult counterparts. Many wind up in the streets because they have aged out of foster care or because of violence at home. National figures suggest that as many as 40 percent are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.” (Boston Globe, By Lisa Wangsness, Globe Staff April 13, 2015)

I am grateful and proud for the young people that spearheaded this effort and their minister, Fred Small. I know teens from Middleborough and Lakeville who came out to the parents and were thrown out of their homes. Your discretionary fund has helped find them shelter. Don’t get me wrong, I know that there are teens and young people who absolutely cannot stay with their families. There is addiction or abuse or grief or something going on. Such kids cannot have a hope of growing up past their problems unless they leave the house. But life is hard on the streets, the streets aren’t the answer to anything.

So, what am I asking of you today? Am I asking you to take in every stray teenager who crosses your path? Well, if you can handle it, sure. But there’s more. I want you to be faithful. Being faithful to any ideal means more than being part of a Welcoming Congregation or a worksite free from harassment or a school without bullies or a condo complex without restrictions. It means more than joining parades or carrying placards. It means more than learning the statistics about teen suicides and hate crimes and scientific explorations of gender and sexuality. It definitely means more than shouting down the ugly rantings of people who hate.

It means trying to embody welcoming and overcoming the fear that comes with that embodiment. It means wrapping your mind around the idea that those you consider “us” or “them” – your relations, your neighbors, your co-workers, your heroes, might not look like you, sound like you, act like you, love like you. It means making no assumptions in your speech and in your actions about who is “us” and who is “them.” It means overcoming your apprehension that you might be aligned with “them.” It means overcoming your fear of stepping outside of your social identity to act on behalf of the whole.

For this soccer mom, it meant having the “talk” about love-making and sexuality and intimacy without using words like boyfriend or husband or girlfriend or wife and saying instead partner or spouse. It means teaching my children how to love safely no matter how they choose to love. It means accepting the fear that my children’s safety

and happiness may be harder than I hoped. It means standing up for the safety and happiness of all children. It means standing up when I encounter stupid jokes and thoughtless policies and saying "We can do better than this." It means saying I love you without you having to love like me. It means I know the world is a richer place for having you in it. I welcome you. Welcome me back.